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GETTING TO THE ROOTS OF A HEALTHY HOLIDAY

Different Cultural Takes on the Holidays Allow More Ways to Celebrate with Fruits and Vegetables

BETHESDA, MD – The weather outside is frightful. The fire inside is delightful. Family and friends have gathered for a holiday celebration. The table is set for a sumptuous holiday meal. The aromas wafting from the table are soothing and reminiscent of the old country. Ah, the smells bring back memories of Vietnam, Paraguay, Italy, a farm in rural North Carolina, or a New Mexico reservation.

That's right, as Americans come together this year to celebrate the holiday season, we are just as likely to say "pass the peas, potatoes and platanos" as we are to ask for more stuffing. Many Americans celebrate the holidays by feasting on traditional foods from the countries and cultures their ancestors knew. As America becomes increasingly diverse, so too does the food we serve when celebrating the holiday season.

"The American holiday celebration feast is not what it used to be. Today it is a wonderful cornucopia of different dishes that reflect our many cultures," said Gloria Stables, M.S., R.D., director of the National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day program. "This ever expanding menu allows for wonderful opportunities to both celebrate your cultural roots and find new and exciting ways to add a variety of fruits and vegetables to your diet, for fun and for better health."

The National Cancer Institute's 5 A Day program has developed five seasonal recipes for holiday side dishes that use a variety of fruits and vegetables and celebrate some of the many cultures in America. These fruit and vegetable recipes are dishes that are served in traditional holiday meals in their respective countries. They include a Vietnamese red and green cabbage salad, a Paraguayan squash soup, an Italian fruit cobbler, a new twist on a traditional African-American sweet potato recipe and a Cherokee corn and bean dish. The common thread that binds these five recipes is that they are fun, easy to make and use fruits and vegetables that are delicious and good for you. (Recipes enclosed)

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Otis Brawley, Director of NCI’s Office of Special Populations Research, appreciates that some parts of his family’s traditional holiday feasts may help prevent cancer. “My wife Yolanda and I make my grandmother’s sweet potato recipe every year during the holiday season,” said Dr. Brawley. “It tastes wonderful and the bright orange color tells me sweet potatoes are high in beta carotene, Vitamins C and E, and folate...Yolanda and I should be making this recipe all year-round!”

Whatever type of fruit or vegetable you use, it is important to take advantage of the many celebrations of the holiday season to find fun ways to honor different cultures and eat healthy foods. And you can start small. While celebrating Hanukah, add an extra scoop of applesauce with your latkes. If you throw a holiday cocktail party, make a punch from 100 percent fruit juice, and float some fresh berries on top. Veggie platters are always big hits, and this year try making the dip out of beans and herbs. And don’t just serve bread—liven it up with fresh or sun-dried tomatoes!

Families and guests will appreciate efforts to make the holidays delicious and healthy. After all, nearly 40 percent of Americans realize the importance of eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day for their overall health, but few actually meet that goal, especially when they are not preparing their own meals.

Remember five is the minimum daily serving of fruits and vegetables people should eat for better health. Most people will benefit from up to nine servings a day. Take advantage of the holiday season to try a range of new dishes that celebrate the many cultures in America and use a variety of fruits and vegetables. The result will be a delicious and nutritious array of fruit and vegetable dishes that you can incorporate into holiday festivities and into your diets year-round

For more information on nutrition and cancer, consumers can call NCI’s Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER, or visit www.5aday.gov. NCI’s website also offers recipes designed for quick, at-home preparation of healthy fruit and vegetable meals through the “Do Yourself a Flavor” recipe database. Examples of the recipes are attached.

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